



# Communication Strategies Used by Pre-service Diplomats in an Indonesian as Foreign Language Context

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**Abstract.** This paper reports on oral language production of adult Indonesian learners whose first language is English. It aims at examining communication strategies used by four pre-service diplomats with intermediate language proficiency. Data collection instruments included audio recordings of semi-structured interviews and free conversations. Spoken data produced by learners was transcribed and analyzed in terms of the frequency of communication strategies. The categorization of the communication strategies was carried out following Dörnyei and Körmös' taxonomy. The result revealed that learners often employed lexical strategies, which showed their L1 or other foreign language influence and self-correction strategies, which presented higher linguistic demands. This study also suggests that teachers should create opportunities for more meaningful and natural communication to enable students to use and develop their communication strategies.

**Keywords:** Communication Strategies · Indonesian Language for Foreigners · Adult Learners

## 1 Introduction

Nowadays the world experiences the highest rate of people migration<sup>2</sup> in the history. Data from Legatum Institute, an international think tank based in London, released in 2017 estimates that one out of thirty people in the world lives outside their country of birth [1]. This migration, both temporary and permanently, has an impact on increasing interaction between speakers with diverse language and cultural backgrounds. As a result, the need for language users to be able to use the target language fluently, especially in the context of spoken language, also increases.

This phenomenon also occurs in foreign learners who study Indonesian, including diplomats assigned to Indonesia. Most of these diplomats served in Indonesia for three years. They are required to be able to use Indonesian as a means of communication in various situations, ranging from everyday conversations to more professional contexts. The determination of foreign embassies to equip their diplomats with Indonesian language skills can be seen from the hours spent for the Indonesian language classes. For

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example, before being sent to Indonesia, each diplomat in embassy X studied intensively in private classes for twelve full weeks, four hours every day. After being sent to Indonesia, they still continue their Indonesian language classes two times longer than the time spent studying Indonesian in their home countries. That is, before starting to work, every diplomat at the X embassy must take an intensive Indonesian language course for thirty-six weeks. This amount is in accordance with the approximate time needed to learn a language as an English speaker which is arranged by the Foreign Service Institute. In this list, Indonesian is in the category two of the four categories compiled (the higher the category, the more difficult a language to learn) [2].

This intensive learning period implies that diplomats are required to achieve advanced Indonesian language skills in a relatively short time. This language course seems to be quite successful because they have not had much difficulty when speaking Indonesian with native speakers in their daily lives. From the results of the needs analysis conducted by researchers at a Indonesian language for foreigners (BIPA) learning institution, most of the students focused on mastering speaking and listening skills. They put the two skills as learning achievements or the most important gains because they were aware that they would not stay in Indonesia for a long time. In addition, they feel that the speaking and listening skills in Indonesian can be used directly in their daily lives. By having sufficient speaking and listening skills, they hope that they can communicate with Indonesian speakers in various contexts.

Even so, it should be noted that every learner is unique. Within them, there are differences that influence the achievement of learning. The differences in each student include personality, language aptitude, motivation, learning style, learning strategy, communication strategy, age, and learner believe [3]. This study focuses on one aspect of these differences, that is the communication strategy. The identification of communication strategies used by these learners is very much needed by teachers, especially teachers for the English learners of Indonesia. By examining the communication strategies employed by pre-service diplomats, the teachers can find out what factors hinder and support the improvement of learners' speaking skills and develop appropriate language learning designs.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

Communication strategy is a systematic technique used by speakers of languages to overcome difficulties or misunderstandings when communicating [4]. This communication strategy includes all kinds of interactional devices related to various fields of competence such as grammatical and conversational competencies, social competencies, and communicative competencies [5].

The term 'communication strategies' was first coined by when a researcher referring to these mechanisms as one of the five central processes that occur in the learning of a second language [6]. Later, other researchers proposed the first definitions [7, 8]. These initial studies focused mainly on defining and classifying these strategies through the creation of taxonomies which would later serve for their analysis and categorization [8, 9]. In addition to this, other researcher also included these strategies in their model of 'communicative competence' as one of its subcomponents, that of 'strategic

competence'; hence, also emphasizing their importance in second language learning [10].

There are two definitions closely akin to the strategies of second language learners. First, strategies are "a systematic technique employed by a speaker to express his meaning when faced with some difficulty", and second, "techniques of coping with difficulties in communicating in an imperfectly known second language" [11]. Those definitions imply that learners apply communication strategies to solve a communication problem and to help them get a message across. Since in second language learning learners have to deal with communication problems usually caused by a lack of linguistic resources, communication strategies may help them to convey their intended meaning appropriately. In using communication strategies, what most important is shared understanding between a speaker and their interlocutor(s).

Reference [12] has categorized CSs into three main categories: avoidance strategies, paraphrasing strategies and borrowing or transferring strategies. Avoidance strategies refer to strategies that a speaker uses to avoid language difficulties such as topic avoiding and message abandonment. Paraphrasing strategies refer to strategies employed by a speaker in order to compensate the linguistic insufficiency such as approximation, word coinage, and circumlocution. The third category transferring strategies refers to strategies such as miming, language switching, and appealing for assistance.

Communication strategies are also categorized into two main categories, namely avoidance strategies and compensatory strategies [13]. Tarone's paraphrasing and transferring strategies are included in compensatory strategies. Avoidance strategies include message termination and topic avoidance. Meanwhile, compensatory strategy is a strategy that involves compensation for lack of knowledge about the object or idea to be expressed. This strategy consists of indirect delivery, approximation, use of versatile words, formation of new words, prefabricated patterns, use of nonlinguistic signals, literal translation, foreignization, code switching, appeal for help, and time gaining strategies.

This communication strategy which follows a psycholinguistic approach and focuses on the management of the four primary problem areas and how they relate to "the various phases of speech processing" was then developed [14]. These problem areas of L2 communication are categorized according to its problem-solving mechanisms (PSM) as shown in Fig. 1. First, PSM related to L2 resource deficit. Second, PSM related to processing time pressure. Next, PSM related to perceived deficiency in one's own language output, and finally PSM related to perceived deficiency in the interlocutor's performance.

Furthermore, when analyzing learners' communicative skills, it becomes essential to bear in mind the kind of learners we have and the context they are immersed in. Researcher reflects on the factors that may affect language learning and teaching, including learners' age [4]. Adult learners have different psychological, social, mastery and learning styles compared to teenagers and children. Even though adult learners often have problems with memory because the ability of the brain to capture and claim new information has diminished, adult learners are better equipped to develop learning and communication strategies and are able to use them to learn languages [15].

<b>L2 Resource Deficit</b>	<i>Lexical PSM</i>	message abandonment, message reduction, message replacement, code switching, approximation, use of all-purpose words, complete omission, foreignizing, grammatical word coinage, literal translation, restructuring, circumlocution, semantic word coinage, appeals for help
	<i>Grammatical PSM</i>	grammatical substitution and reduction
	<i>Phonological and Articulatory</i>	phonological retrieval, phonological and articulatory substitution and reduction
<b>Processing time pressure</b>	<i>Pauses</i>	unfilled pauses, umming and erring, sound lengthening, fillers,
	<i>Repetitions</i>	self-repetition, other repetition
<b>Perceived deficiency in one's own language output</b>	<i>Self-Correction</i>	error repair, appropriacy repair, different- repair, rephrasing repair
	<i>Asking Check Questions</i>	comprehension checks, own-accuracy checks
<b>Perceived deficiency in the interlocutor's performance</b>	<i>Meaning Negotiation</i>	asking for repetition, asking for clarification, expressing non-understanding, asking for confirmation, interpretive summary, guessing, other-repair, feigning understanding

**Fig. 1.** Dörnyei and Körmös' Problem-solving Mechanism

This is in accordance with other researcher which refers to Krashen's view, who states that adult learners use communication strategies well when they receive complex input even though their knowledge is limited [11]. They use communication strategies so that they can overcome the difficulties that arise when they communicate in the target language. On the other hand, children's learners get simpler input, often done by repetition, with excessive intonation, and accompanied by body language. As a result, children's learners tend to use simpler strategies.

### 3 Methodology

This study uses a qualitative study of oral language production by English learners of Indonesian. This study aims to examine communication strategies employed by intermediate BIPA adult learners and try to find possible explanation regarding the reason behind learners' employment of communication strategies.

#### 3.1 Context and Participants

The subjects of the research were selected using purposive sampling where the researcher chose those subjects based on the similarity or distinctiveness they possessed. In selecting

the subjects of the research, the researcher considered several variables, i.e., ages, level of Indonesian language, and language background. The subjects in this study were learners who were aged eighteen and above and worked as diplomats at the Embassy in Jakarta. Their Indonesian is at an intermediate level.

Regarding respondents in the study, researchers purposively chose four intermediate BIPA students because they have sufficient Indonesian language vocabulary. Vocabulary mastery is important since knowledge of vocabulary is the main component in second language learning competencies even though speaking ability is also determined by the speed in remembering and using vocabulary that has been mastered. In addition, a rich vocabulary will enable learners to use a more diverse communication strategy, for example by using an indirect delivery strategy, which is to speak by using longer phrases to explain the actions or concepts to be conveyed [17].

Meanwhile, researchers looked at adult learners because adult learners have a repertoire of learning strategies and communications that are more diverse than teenagers or children. As a result, adult learners tend to use more complex and expanded strategies, along with learners' cognitive development [14]. Therefore, by choosing intermediate adult learners as research subjects, it is expected that this research can provide richer and more diverse data which shed some lights on the learners' communication strategies.

### **3.2 Instruments**

The data in this study were obtained by recording the speech produced by the research. Each subject was interviewed, and audio recorded; this interaction was impromptu, due to the fact that they did not have time to prepare the answers in advance. Oral language production with a total duration of three hours were collected using two methods: semi-structured interviews and free conversations. The oral language production was recorded and manually transcribed by the researcher.

### **3.3 Procedures**

Prior to the data collection, some important ethical issues were addressed by informing the participants about the aims of this study and that their conversation would be recorded for research purposes. For the data collection, the researcher obtains the data from two different tasks. First, participants conducted a discussion with the researcher about a range of issues. In this task, they were requested to speak Indonesian as much as possible while the researcher spoke only Indonesian. Second, the participants were interviewed using semi-structured interview to answer some questions about their backgrounds and experiences.

The data collection sessions were carried out in the Indonesian classes for diplomats. The classes took place privately, face-to-face learning between one teacher and one learner. In one-to-one classes, the student have the undivided attention of the teacher, so they can have more opportunity to listen to and speak Indonesian. The researcher recorded learners' language production where each student interacted with the researcher in a free conversation and other session where each student answers the semi-structured interview. Once the data was collected, it was transcribed and

examined following categorization of communication strategies according to learners' problem-solving mechanisms.

## 4 Result and Discussion

This section presents and analyzes the findings of observations of how the pre-service diplomats employ communication strategies in their classroom interactions and the reasons behind their use of effective communication strategies. Learners in this study are good Indonesian communicators as they have mastered sufficient aspects of their communicative competence and oral performance skills. All learners in this study always try to use Indonesian for the interactions without being embarrassed when they made mistakes or errors. As learners' linguistic knowledge is sufficient, they used more communication strategies that help them to pass their messages across. As shown in Table 1, it is also found that whenever they get in a linguistic trouble in their interaction, the most common strategy they used was a lexical problem-solving mechanism, mostly to switch into mother tongue, and self-correction strategies where the learners made self-initiated corrections of accidental lapses in their speech. The language switch shows the learners' need for resorting to their L1 by means of 'code switching'. This result contradicts with some other research which state that less proficient learners tend to use code switch as they need to rely on their L1 due to their restricted L2 knowledge while more proficient learners prefer to use more cognitively demanding mechanisms which require more knowledge of the L2 [18]. One possible reason why they found language switch is so easy and effective strategy in communicating their messages is they might perceive that the researcher also speaks English. Hence, the communication then became focused more on content rather than its form.

The analysis of L2 resource deficit indicated a more frequent use of 'code switching' (CS) and 'grammatical substitution' (GS). The former was employed 22 times and GS was used 18 times. Other communication strategies within this category were also used, but in a fewer extent: 'message abandonment', 'foreignizing', 'approximation', 'use of all-purpose words', 'semantic word coinage', and 'grammatical reduction'. The following excerpt illustrates the use of CS and GS which presented a higher frequency.

example (1) 'code switching'.

speaker:Ketika saya tidak ada, oo ada terebi...

(when I did not have a television).

**Table 1.** Total Results Obtained in Relation to The Use of Each Communication Strategies (CS) Category

L2 Resource Deficit		Processing Time Pressure		Own-output deficiency		Interlocutor deficiency		Total N CSs
52	46.8	17	15.3	42	37.9	0	0	111 (100%)

example (2) ‘code switching’.

speaker: *Seringkali tidak ada trotoar, tidak ada space yang cukup untuk berjalan*  
(often there is no sidewalks, not enough room for walking)

example (3) ‘grammatical substitution’

speaker: *tetapi itu tidak ada masalah, saya tidak menakutkan.*

(but it is not a problem, I’m not afraid)

example (4) ‘grammatical substitution’

speaker: *orang Indonesia tidak memikirkan tentang Australia ketika mereka mau berbisnis*

(Indonesian do not think about Australia when they want to do business)

Interestingly, it was also found that learners not only resorting to their L1 but also to their L2 as shown in example (1). In this case, since she did not know or remember how to say ‘television’ in Indonesian, the speaker then switched to Japanese, a language she had mastered prior to Indonesian. A tentative explanation for this is the speaker might perceive both Indonesian and Japanese as the foreign language. Therefore in her mind, the word ‘terebi’ and ‘televisi’ are equivalent to English word ‘television’.

Furthermore, the use of self-correction strategies seems to present more cognitive and linguistic demands since it involves a complete or partial reformulation of the original verbal plan as well as self-monitoring of the speakers’ own output [14]. These learners’ communication strategies evidenced higher linguistic demands which were reflected in learners’ longer and more elaborated interventions as well as in the varied conversation topics. This not only demonstrates their higher command of the L2, but also their higher communicative demands when trying to produce more and more complex language, which made them encounter more communication problems and pushed them to rely on more effective stalling mechanisms. The following excerpt illustrates the use of error repair which showed a higher frequency.

example (5) ‘error repair’.

speaker: *meskipun saya dilahir, saya lahir jauh dari kota.*

(although I was borned, I borned far from the city)

example (6) ‘error repair’.

speaker: *...di jalan dengan mobil dan itu sedikit berbahagia, berbahaya*

(...on the road by car and that was a little happy, dangerous)

In example (5), the learner repaired error in the overgeneralization of passive voice. In Indonesian, the word ‘dilahir’ was not accepted. It should be ‘lahir’, ‘dilahirkan’ or ‘terlahir’ in order to express the sentence ‘I was born’. Meanwhile, in example (6), the speaker made lexical error by using the word ‘berbahagia’ instead of ‘berbahaya’. She made errors probably because she did not remember the words or perhaps she got mixed up with the similar-sounding words. This is often happened since when we speak quickly in a normal conversation, we say things we know are not right, but we say them

anyways. Later that we listen to ourselves, we realize immediately that that is not correct and repair it.

Similar findings have been observed in other study where proficient learners have been found more likely to monitor their own output and therefore able to repair their own L2 speech [19]. Learners are more likely to repair those instances which they consider more serious, and which therefore require more effort on their part. Additionally, they will tend to focus on correcting errors which may hinder the communication process and all aspects which correspond with the learners' proficiency level. It should also be considered that the higher language complexity evidenced by proficient learners may have been influenced by the type of task – a semi-structured interview and a free conversation activity.

Finally, the learners in this research did not employ problem-solving mechanism related to other-performance problems such as asking for repetition and clarification. This might come up because the researcher is the learners' teacher. As a teacher, the researcher used to speak with clear pronunciation and make careful word choices. As a result, learners could fully understand the researcher's utterances without negotiating the meaning.

## 5 Conclusion

The findings show that English learners of Indonesian language with intermediate level tend to use a more complex problem-solving mechanism. This appears to indicate their closer approximation to the target language as their broader linguistic repertoire allowed them to correct and evaluate their own L2 output, something the beginner levels were not yet able to do. Hence, it seems that these Indonesian L2 learners needed to resort to different communication strategies in order to cope with different types of communication problems as their interlanguage progressed towards the mastery of the L2.

Furthermore, as observed in the transcripts of the conversations, the simulation of a more natural setting prompted the learners' communication thus their use of communication strategies in order to solve the difficulties encountered. As opposed to the procedures followed by most research, the use of a free conversation activity in this type of context proved to be useful for the elicitation of the communication strategies. However, since the learners did not employ any meaning negotiation strategies, it is suggested that the researcher applies etic perspective, an "outsiders" view in the sense that it requires one to become a detached, objective, scientific observer.

Finally, it should also be noticed that even though this was a small-scale study where the results cannot be generalized, this study shows the importance of observing L2 learners' communication strategies. By doing this, both learners' interlanguage development and the problems they encounter when using the language in each of these stages can be perceived. This type of information could be very useful in pedagogical contexts, as it could guide teachers on the specific problems their students experience when communicating in target language.

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